

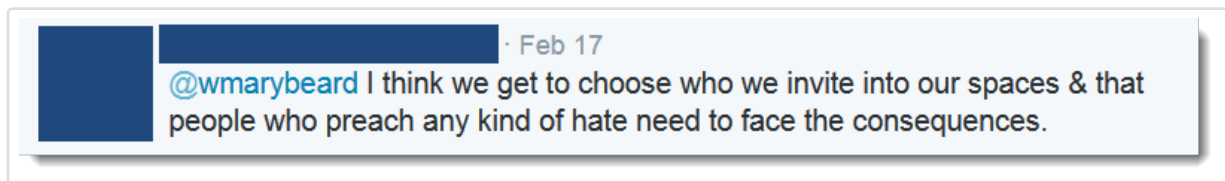
'You Are Killing Me': On Hate Speech and Feminist Silencing

37

Radical feminists are regularly accused of denying trans people's right to exist, or even of wanting them dead. Here Jane Clare Jones takes a closer look at these charges. Where do they come from and what do they mean? Is there a way to move towards a more constructive discussion?

The claim that certain forms of feminist speech should be silenced has recently become common currency. Notable instances include the ongoing NUS no-platforming of Julie Bindel, the cancellation of a performance by the comedian Kate Smurthwaite (which prompted a letter to the Observer), and, in the last month, the demand that a progressive Canadian website end its association with the feminist writer Meghan Murphy.

The basis of this claim is the assertion that a certain strand of feminist thought is hate speech. Versions of that assertion have circulated on social media for a number of years — complete with obligatory analogies between Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs) and Nazis, the BNP or the Ku Klux Klan. But its effectiveness in excising speech from the public sphere was really brought home to me in August 2014, when the journalist and trans activist Paris Lees pulled out of a Newsnight debate with the gender-critical trans woman Miranda Yardley, saying she was 'not prepared to enter into a fabricated debate about trans people's right to exist.'

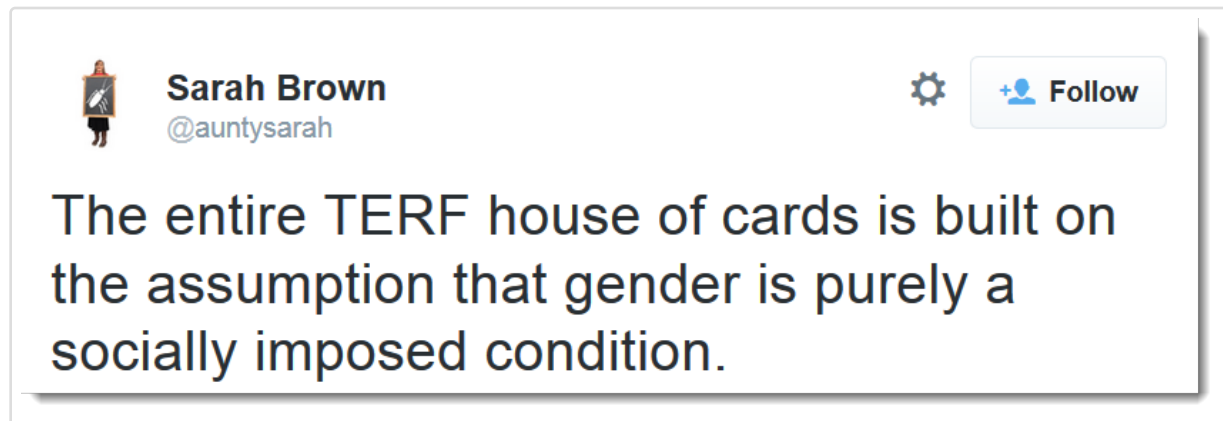


More recently, the claim that TERFs want to 'debate trans people's right to exist' has morphed into the more-or-less explicit suggestion that TERFs are intent on extermination. Blogs defending feminist-silencing have argued that dialogue is impossible when "some at the table are...arguing for the elimination of others at the table," or "one side is effectively being forced to argue for their entire existence against a group of people... who would like to see us dead."

The argument that what some feminists want to say is hate speech can be broken down into three interrelated assertions. In ascending order of seriousness, these are that TERFs (1) deny trans people's existence and/or right to exist; (2) actively want trans people not to exist; and

(3) engage in behaviour responsible for trans people's deaths.

Claim 1: TERFs deny trans people's existence/right to exist



At first glance, this claim seems absurd. Trans people clearly exist: feminism is not being ripped apart by a conflict with and about non-existent people. Making this claim make sense therefore, requires us to accept an elision between 'the existence of trans people' and 'the existence of trans people *according to transgender ideology's account of the existence of trans people*.' That is, the theory that trans people's existence is explicable in terms of 'gender identity,' an innate quality which is the immutable source of a person's gender.

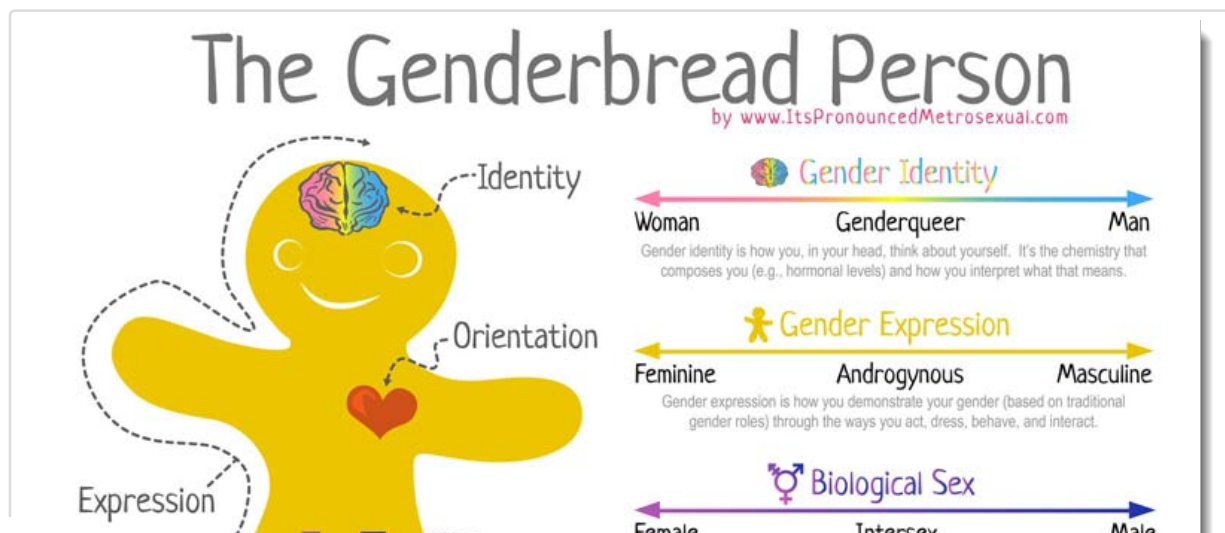
This theory seems to have emerged in a clinical and academic context, before being incorporated into the ideology of trans activists. It is a theoretical elaboration of the common trans narrative which focuses on the experience of being a 'woman trapped inside a man's body.' In her [detailed chronicle](#) of the backlash which followed the publication of J. Michael Bailey's 2003 book *The Man Who Would Be Queen*, Alice Dreger calls this the 'feminine essence' narrative, an account which holds that 'trans people suffer from a sort of trick of nature, whereby they have the brain of one gender in the body typical of the other... a sort of neurological intersex condition, typically understood to be inborn'.

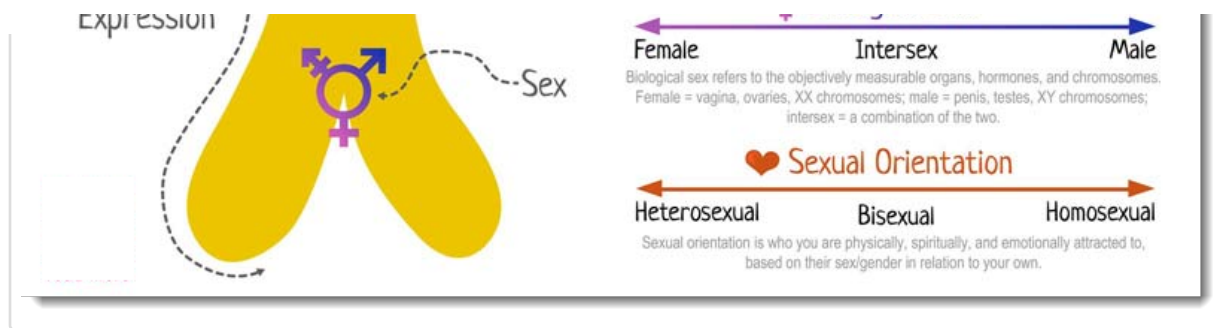
Feminism, as a political movement aimed at the liberation of women, has long theorized gender not as an innate essence, but as a hierarchical system enforcing women's subservience. Characterizing certain personality traits – compliance, nurturance, the desire to be pretty or objectified – as 'natural' to women, is, according to feminist analysis, a primary mechanism for maintaining gender hierarchy. As a result, many feminists have genuine questions about trans ideology's assertion that 'gender identity' is both natural and universal.

It comes perilously close to naturalizing the oppression of women.

This is not trivial, and it needs to be discussed. But it has been decreed that it cannot be discussed, because to discuss it is to 'deny the right of trans people to exist.' Trans ideology collapses *the fact* that trans people exist into *the theory of why* trans people exist, and judges anyone who questions the theory to be a transphobic bigot intent on denying the very existence of trans people. Indeed, even those trans women who persist in existing despite subscribing to the feminist critique of gender are denounced by many in their community as self-hating or treacherous. This is argument by non-argument, and it functions to close down discourse by rendering feminism's long-held analysis of gender unsayable.

Maintaining that anyone who questions the theory of gender identity must be transphobic is equivalent to arguing that anyone who disputes 'born-that-way' narratives of homosexuality must be a homophobe. In both cases, this manoeuvre points to a belief that the moral acceptability of gay people or trans people depends on convincing others that their existence is 'natural'. Given the historical injunctions against 'perverted' or 'unnatural' desire (in the case of homosexuality) and 'deviance' (in the case of gender non-conformity), it is understandable that movements for gay, and more recently, trans rights have invested so heavily in a narrative of naturalness. But to respond to the patriarchal accusation of 'unnaturalness' with a counter-assertion of 'naturalness' – whether in the form of a 'gay gene', or brain-sex as the seat of gender identity – is to remain firmly within the purview of the patriarchal belief that naturalness is the criterion for moral acceptability. And it isn't. Gay, lesbian, bi- and pansexual people are okay as they are because *they are okay as they are*. And the same is true for trans people. Perhaps feminists who question the 'naturalness' of gender identity are heard as undermining the moral acceptability of trans people's existence. But that is to assume feminists are invested in the patriarchal coupling of 'naturalness' and moral acceptability, when they are the very last people who are.





So, if feminist questions about gender identity are not a denial of trans people's existence, or, indeed, their moral acceptability, what else might this 'denial' consist of? The complexity of the issues here can be condensed into the question of whether a woman is willing to accept the axiom that 'trans women are women'. And while trans activists claim to push gender 'beyond the binary,' it is notable that this axiom exists only in relation to its absolute negation, that is, to the statement 'trans women are *not* women' or indeed, 'trans women are men.' When asked, as one often is these days, whether one believes that 'trans women are women,' the answer can only be 'yes' or 'no'. One cannot respond, as many women would want to, 'well, the answer to this question is both yes and no'.

Undergirded by an appeal to boy-brains and girl-brains, trans ideology's core commitment is that a person's gender is *nothing other than their gender identity*. Gender resides entirely in an individual's private experience of 'feeling like' a man or a woman, and therefore, if an individual declares that they feel like a woman, then they are a woman, and moreover have always been a woman, *in exactly the same way* as non-trans women have always been women. From a feminist perspective what is lost in this account is *the entire structure of gender as a system of oppression*, a system which functions by identifying a person's reproductive potential and then socializing women to fulfil the role of a member of the reproductive class. For many non-trans women the idea that the essence of being a woman resides in 'feeling like' a woman, is not so much wrong as **incomprehensible**. Our experience of womanhood is not an internal feeling, but a lifelong process of being subjected to – and revolting against – very specific social sanctions and expectations. Be quiet. Look pretty. Make yourself small. Smile. Don't be too demanding. *Accommodate other people*.

When feminists raise these points, we are sometimes accused of indulging in 'academic' debates when other people's lives are at stake, as if the constricting of female persons by patriarchy was somehow *not* about people's lives. But this debate is not academic for anyone involved. For both trans and non-trans women, what is at stake is the ability to understand themselves in a way that makes their lives livable. For feminist women, the axiom 'trans women are women,' when understood to mean 'womanhood *is* gender identity and hence, trans women are women in *exactly the same way* as non-trans women are women' is

experienced as an extreme erasure of the way our being-as-women is marked by a system of patriarchal violence that aims to control our sexed bodies.

This system of patriarchal violence also marks the lives of trans women, who are indubitably victims of the kinds of male violence feminists have spent years attempting to resist. To cast certain feminists as the principal threat to trans existence, it is therefore necessary for trans-ideology to *sideline* the patriarchal violence that affects both women and trans people, and instead, position feminists at the apex of a structure of oppression. One of the main strategies for achieving this is the elaboration of the category of 'cis-privilege'.

Cis-privilege

In her 1983 essay 'Oppression', Marilyn Frye noted that the concept of oppression has a tendency to be 'stretched into meaninglessness...as though its scope includes any and all human experience of limitation and suffering, no matter the cause, degree or consequence' (p.1). At a time when axes of oppression seem to be proliferating, unencumbered by any account of the motive of domination, Frye's essay is increasingly apposite. Privilege — a once useful way of illustrating how certain structures bend the world around the interests of particular classes — is now routinely invoked to describe any advantage that another person lacks, whether or not that advantage stems from a system of structural domination. Indeed, advantage itself is often assumed to be ample evidence of the existence of oppression.

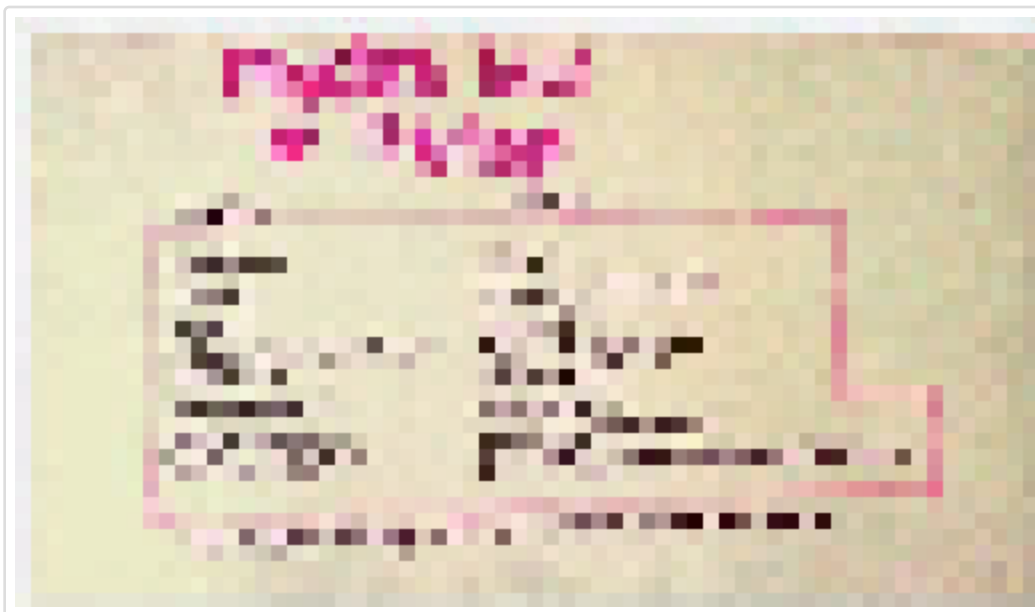
It is clear that being trans presents challenges and difficulties within a social system which does not recognize the possibility of trans-ness, and is not designed to cater for the particular needs of trans people. The demand for recognition, visibility, social acceptance and political organization around specific interests is necessary and important. However, according to Frye, understanding a limitation as an instance of oppression requires more than ascertaining 'if it is part of an enclosing structure of ...barriers which tends to the immobilization...of a group...of people.' (p.10). It also necessitates looking at "how the barrier...fits with others, and *to whose benefit or detriment it works*' (my emphasis; p.11).

The oppression of women-as-women is established by understanding *the function of that oppression*: women-as-a-class are oppressed by men-as-a-class for the purpose of, Frye continues, "the service of men and men's interest, which includes the bearing and raising of children" as well as a variety of other "service work" including domestic and personal service, sexual service and ego or emotional service (p.9). Women are oppressed as women because that oppression enables men to extract resources — in the form of reproductive, domestic, sexual and emotional labour — from women. Similarly, class- and race-based oppression is structured around the extraction of labour-resources from the oppressed group. And the question we must then ask is, in what sense are the real limitations experienced by trans people to be understood as part of a specific structure of oppression aimed at extracting resources from trans people as a class?

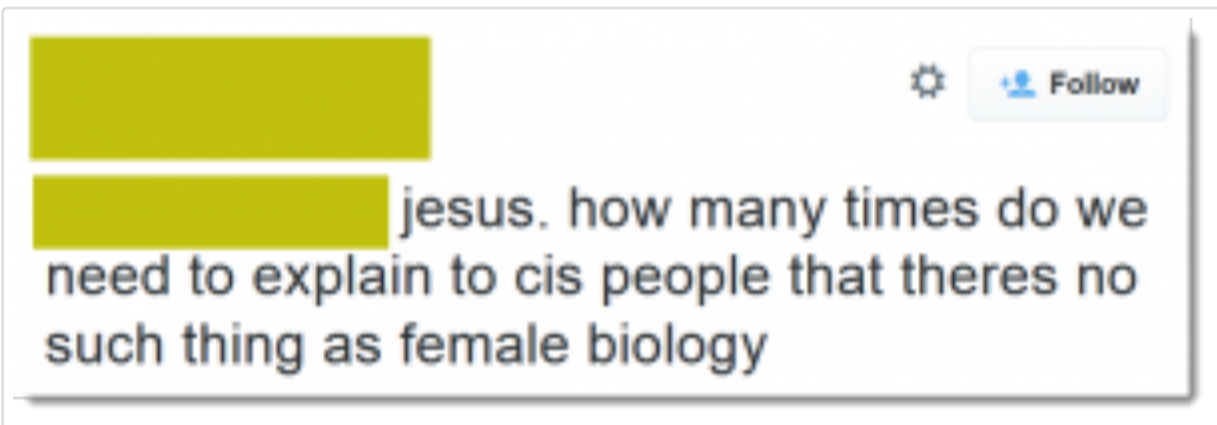
Again, it is useful to compare this case with discrimination against homosexuals. Gay men and lesbians experience, or have experienced, profound limitations on their ability to lead flourishing lives. Those limitations did not, however, arise out of the desire of non-homosexual people to appropriate the labour of homosexual people as a class. Rather, limitations on the free expression of homosexuality arose as an adjunct of patriarchal ideas about the 'naturalness' of heterosexual coupling, and the 'natural' gender roles of the sexed individuals within that coupling. That is, the injunction against homosexuality is part of heteronormativity, and since the primary function of heteronormativity is to naturalise men's appropriation of women's bodies, the restrictions on homosexuality are a variant of patriarchal oppression.

Similarly, the limitations on trans people's freedom to determine their gendered-expression results from the fact that such expressions *have been gendered by patriarchy*. But this is an explanatory framework which trans ideology – with its conception of innate gender – is totally unable to access. In its place, transgender ideology posits an entirely unmotivated system of cis-gender oppression which inheres, not in the yoking of particular sexed bodies to acceptable gendered behaviours, but in the very identification of sexual dimorphism in humans.

Here we encounter a perfect inversion of feminist thought. In the place of the material reality of sex and the social construction of gender, we find the social construction of sex and the material reality of gender. What feminist thinkers have traditionally identified as the essentialist yoking of sexed-body to gendered behaviour is rewritten as the privilege of alignment between one's gender identity and the sex one is coercively assigned at birth.

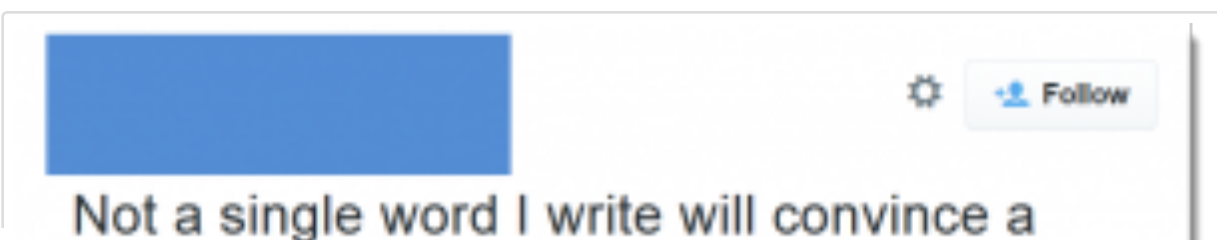


This privilege (which is really an **oppression**), is then invoked to position non-trans women as the oppressors of trans people. There can be no question of *to what end* non-trans women are invested in the oppression of trans-women. As the oppressor, non-trans women are not permitted to question this: we must understand that the only just course of action is to acquiesce without a murmur to the stated needs of the oppressed. And so the possibility of solidarity between non-trans and trans women, based on the recognition that we are equally—though differently—constrained by heteronormative ideologies of gender, is thoroughly blocked. There is no acknowledgement that we are both suffering under the same system, and there can be no negotiation of how to accommodate our varying needs within feminism as a political movement. There *can be no conversation*. After all, you do not negotiate with an oppressor who is interested only in exploiting you and doing you untold harm.



Claim 2: TERFs want trans people 'mandated out of existence'

The positioning of cis-women as agents of domination is crucial to the claim that gender-critical feminism is a form of hate speech, because it endows radical feminists with sufficient social power to sustain the story that skepticism about the concept of gender identity is a prime factor in the violence experienced by trans people. Although, as we will explore later, such violence is best understood in the context of patriarchal enforcement, it is trans-ideology's constant concern to position feminists as trans people's principal oppressor.



Not a single word I write will convince a #TERF that I'm a woman, & have a right not to be 'mandated out of existence'.

This strategy is bolstered — as suggested by the blog quoted above — by the claim that feminists actively desire the deaths of trans people. To the best of my knowledge, the sole textual basis for this assertion is the endlessly recycled quote by Janice Raymond from *The Transsexual Empire*:

I contend that the problem with transsexualism would best be served by morally mandating it out of existence.

It's not my intention here to defend Raymond's body of work — or to deny that some radical feminists have expressed themselves in a way that is deeply derogatory towards trans women. But what is clear is that 'morally mandating transsexualism out of existence' is not an expression of the desire to annihilate transsexual people. The claim — once read through a feminist critique of gender — is evidently that the patriarchal system of gender normativity is *the condition of possibility of transsexuality*. That is, if behaviour was not socially coded as masculine or feminine, individuals could not experience a disjunction between the apparently gendered nature of their personality, and their sexed bodies.

Dec 21
Here's a trans lady getting "mandated out of existence" physically in a murder-robbery: starobserver.com.au/news/local-new...

Trans ideology, as well as much of what passes for contemporary feminism, considers gender identity to be an essential property of persons, rather than the way society shoves personalities into gendered boxes. And as such, it's unsurprising that few people seem able to even *hear* what Raymond is saying. Whether she is right is another question: we cannot know what would remain of gender norms, or if and how trans identity would manifest itself, in the absence of patriarchy. But what is clear is that without gender normativity, the type of trans narrative we hear so often today — one which, say, associates 'feeling like a boy' with a disinterest in dolls and domesticity — would lose its mooring and quite simply cease to be meaningful.

Claim 3: TERFs are responsible for the deaths of trans women

[actions & protests](#) | [gender & sexuality](#)

Solidarity with Trans Women: Picket Portland "Mini-Michfest" TERF Festival April 18

author: Portland Anti-TERF/SWERF Action Team, PATSAT

TERFs in Portland area are holding a "mini-Michfest" event on April 18 to raise money for Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, the annual weeklong orgy of TERF Lesbian Separatist hate rallies against Trans Women and Gender Non Conforming CAMAB folks.

TERF's (Transgender Exterminationist Radical Feminists) believe Trans Women and Gender Non Conforming/Genderqueer CAMAB folks do not deserve human rights. They rejoice when Trans Women of Color are murdered, or imprisoned and gang-raped by other inmates of men's prisons. They work with Far-Right hate groups such as Focus On The Family, Pacific Justice Institute, and Alliance Defending Freedom to help pass state laws to criminalize Trans Women using restrooms and to repeal local non-discrimination ordinances.

TERFs in Portland will be celebrating their willing support of systemic genocide of Trans Women on Saturday, April 18th from 8PM to Midnight.

We call all Trans folks, Gender Non Conforming and Genderqueer folks, and our allies to stop this event from occurring.

We will picket the venue, Cotton Cloud Futon (a TERF-owned business), 701 NE Broadway in Lloyd District, to create visibility and prevent the event from happening. This is a fundraiser for TERF organization Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. The less people attend there will be less money going to TERFs.

TERFs must learn the lesson that they can't be a bunch of neanderthals anymore.

Source: <http://portland.indymedia.org/en/2015/03/429291.shtml>

Despite the increasing prevalence of exterminationist rhetoric, it has not, to my knowledge, ever been suggested that TERFs actually kill trans people. Rather, the suggestion is that a) the type of transphobia attributed to TERFs feeds wider social conditions that contribute to the deaths of trans people and b) TERFs engage in specific behaviours — such as harassment and preventing access to services — which contribute to the deaths of trans people.

A typical version of the first claim goes something like [this](#):

We believe that it *is* violence when Germaine Greer announces "I don't believe in transphobia", or when Rupert Read describes trans women as "a sort of 'opt-in' version of what it is to be a woman". These are violent acts both in themselves and in their perpetuation of a culture in which physical and sexual violence against trans people and sex workers is both extremely high.

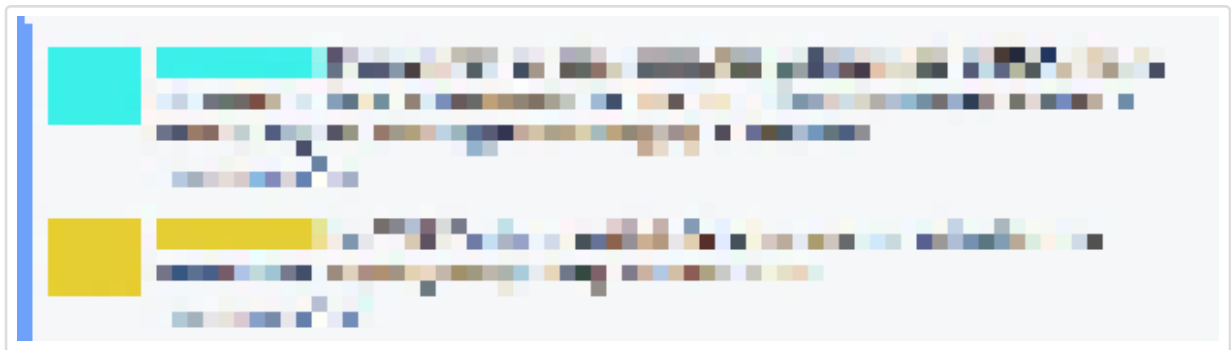
Or like [this](#):

The problematising of trans identity on college campuses or elsewhere amplifies an already endemic mainstream mindset that sees trans women... as laughable at best and dangerous predators at worst. A result of this transphobia is that trans people are eight times more likely to commit suicide

than the general population.

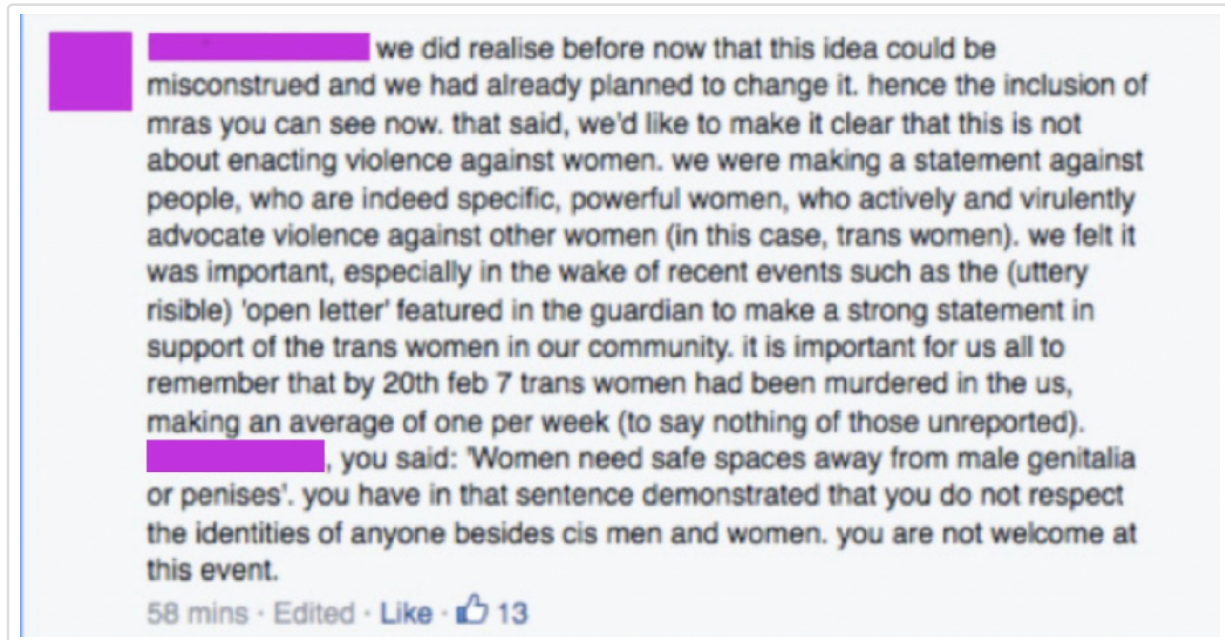
This claim relies on positing a continuity between the alleged transphobia of gender-critical feminists, and an 'endemic mainstream mindset' conceived as responsible for harm to trans people. This example cites the disproportionately high number of trans suicides, but a similar claim is also made in relation to trans deaths by lethal violence.

The issue of the murder of trans people is the instance in which the alleged continuum between feminist speech and substantive harm is the most difficult – which is to say impossible – to maintain. The violence which affects mostly trans women, and disproportionately trans women of colour, is almost entirely male violence, very often at the hands of partners or other family members. It is therefore related (though not identical) to the patriarchal violence also directed at non-trans women. Women are **killed by men for being women**. And trans women, it seems, are killed by men for being women *and/or* for being trans women. As of March 2015, the murders of eight trans people (seven of them women of colour) had been reported in the US (Lamia Beard, Ty Underwood, Yazmin Vash Payne, Taja de Jesus, Penny Proud, Bri Golec, Kristina Gomez Reinwald and Sumaya Ysl). Of the six whose killers have so far been identified, four were killed by men known or believed to have been their boyfriends, one was killed by her father and one was killed during a robbery.



Men do not murder their girlfriends, or commit homophobic or transphobic violence against people they perceive as gender non-conforming, because they have been whipped into a fury by feminists. Violent heteronormative masculinity is not maintained by the assiduous study of Sheila Jeffreys or Janice Raymond. Male violence is committed, day in and day out, by people who have never even *heard* of Sheila Jeffreys or Janice Raymond, or ever had contact with anyone who has. If you don't like what Janice Raymond has to say, by all means, take Janice Raymond to task. But to suggest that anyone asking questions about trans ideology must be silenced because Janice Raymond somehow made men kill trans women is so utterly absurd it

would be laughable, were it not trotted out so often to silence women, and did it not bear such striking resemblance to the tried and tested technique of blaming women for inciting the violence of men.



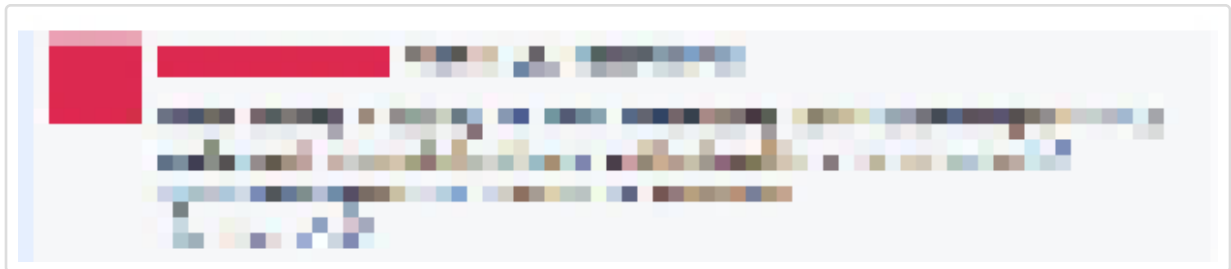
Blaming feminists for men's violence against trans women is not only slanderous, but inordinately frustrating, because such violence is the principal site of the *actual* erasure of trans women. This is the place where trans and non-trans women could most obviously come together in shared resistance. But instead, trans ideology would rather erase the possibility of that solidarity, and martyr murdered trans women to an amorphous TERF-inspired hatred, in order to score rhetorical points off feminists.

The claim that feminist speech is responsible for the suicide of trans people depends, once again, on forging a strong connection between gender critical feminism and an 'endemic mainstream mindset' hostile to trans people. The causes of suicide are complex: each case is different and there are no simple, general explanations. But considering that the feminist critique of gender is obscure, whereas the patriarchal policing of gender norms is all-pervasive, it seems *far more likely* that the 'endemic mainstream mindset' which most contributes to the challenges and constraints trans people face is — like the lethal violence of men — the product of patriarchy.

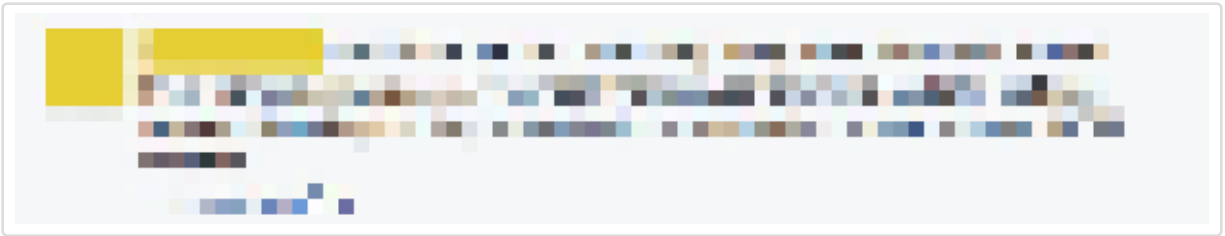
TERFS' behaviour contributes to the deaths of trans people

Trans activists routinely claim that TERFs engage in two types of behaviour linked to the deaths of trans people: harassment and denying access to services. The harassment is said to include doxxing, contacting people's employers, threatening communication, and in at least one case, stalking. All things which are emphatically not okay. But anyone who tells you that this behaviour is confined to only one side of this conflict — or tries to draw a distinction between the abusiveness of their adversaries and the 'legitimate' violence of their allies — should be treated with extreme skepticism. Such unconscionable and unnecessarily hostility is not the product of any specific system of belief so much as a dogmatic narcissistic righteousness fundamentally inimical to any purported operation of justice.

This issue is complicated, however, by an increasing tendency among some people to conceive of mere exposure to people you disagree with as a kind of harassment. The concept of 'safe space' — which once meant knowing you could speak without someone coming down on you like a ton-of-judgmental-bricks — now means almost the opposite: ensuring you are never exposed to views you find 'oppressive,' or 'triggering.' A safe-space enshrines judgment about someone else's speech with such rigour that they never open their mouth at all.



Any group which coalesced around the aim of denying another group access to vital services could rightly be considered a danger to that group. In the case of healthcare, questioning the theory of gender identity does not entail denying trans people's real experience of dysphoria, nor saying they shouldn't be given whatever medical support they need. No one should be denied treatment vitally necessary for their well-being or flourishing. But conflicts around access to other services are more difficult, because the issue has become entirely enmeshed with affirming the axiom 'trans women are women.' The position of feminists critical of the concept of gender identity is that trans women are like non-trans women in some respects (through performing the social role of woman they are subject to the same violences and erasures), and not like non-trans women in others (particularly with regard to reproductive issues, and the trauma which stems from female socialization and early exposure to sexual objectification and male violence).



These differences mean that our needs and interests are not identical, although they coincide in several places. I am an advocate of a care-based concept of justice, which means I believe adequately attending to people's needs is a crucial component of justice. I therefore think that the most just way to negotiate this situation is to consider the needs of all parties involved, and try and provide solutions that meet everybody's needs as far as is humanly possible. But to do this means accepting that everyone involved has legitimate needs, without one side accusing the other of trying to kill them.

There are real questions about the way in which trans and non-trans women's experience of being women inflects their needs, and we should take these seriously. But the endless fight about toilets and changing rooms is also about something other than toilets and changing rooms. It is about what access to toilets and changing rooms signifies for trans women. It is about access to women's space as a validation of the identities of trans women. Were this not the case, we could have sat down and sorted all this out by now. We could have thrashed out where our needs were similar and where they were not, where we could work together and where it might be more appropriate to focus on divergent goals. But to do that requires an acknowledgement of the fact that we are both similar and different, and that acknowledgement is one that trans ideology will not countenance.

And so we reach an impasse.

A final reflection on reflection

To be a woman, under patriarchy, is to be a mirror. We are raised to reflect, to efface ourselves and accommodate. We are the surface and material upon which men make themselves, winnowing out our subjectivity in the service of others. And feminism is the practice of refusing to empty ourselves in order to receive the impressions of others.

It is not ethically impermissible to refuse to be a mirror. For some women, sometimes, it is survival itself. But it *is* ethically impermissible to demand that someone else erase themselves in order to reflect back to you exactly what you need them to reflect.

Affirmation cannot be taken, only given freely, or not at all. And when someone does not meet your needs, they are not killing you.

We are not sovereign beings: what we are exists between us and others. What we are, and how others experience us, is outside ourselves, in the warp and weft of the world, beyond our control.

And at the same time, there is, in each of us, a place inside, a warm spot, just below your belly, where none of this may matter. It can take years of work to find it, but what you need is there. And it cannot come from any other place.

You are okay just the way you are.

Jane Clare Jones blogs at www.janeclarejones.com

Reference

Marilyn Frye, 'Oppression', *The Politics of Reality* (The Crossing Press, 1983). [Link](#)

21 comments to 'You Are Killing Me': On Hate Speech and Feminist Silencing



hora

[May 17, 2015 at 06:08](#)

brilliant.

I think this is as clearly and generously as radical feminism can present the gender-critical argument to outsiders.

My only nit to pick is that, related to the question of what "trans" IS, there are profound questions about what "care" of trans people is and what "needs" trans people have. Of course both sides say that they want to care for trans people and make sure that their needs are met. And both sides mean it sincerely, yet we are light years apart on what that means.

Is giving people very invasive surgeries with no medical function (and a proposed but debunked psychiatric function) an appalling act of medical malpractice or an act of "care"? Is giving men who believe they are women what they want (surgery, hormones, legal status as women) akin to helping an anorexic woman diet, or is it much-needed affirmation

and emotional care? Is reducing the barriers to children "transitioning" an act of care and understanding, or is it simply greasing the skids on a dangerous slide into sterilizing children and producing "transition" so quickly that rates of people with severe regret rise sharply?

It's very difficult, as you said, to try to meet on common ground and have EVERYONE'S needs met, and have everyone receive the best care, when we fundamentally disagree on what that is. These men tend to see women giving and giving and giving up everything (our safe spaces, our dedicated resources, our bathrooms, etc.) as the only possibility of what "care" could look like. It's a tough place to create anything resembling productive collaboration or coalition-building from.



Tigger

May 17, 2015 at 11:18

What an excellent and clear account of the argument. I found it very helpful.

I'm no diplomat, not a student of feminist/trans texts, so it's very likely these observations will be shot down in flames. I apologise in advance.

Some years before all this kicked off I employed a woman plumber to do some work. Since only very determined women can bear to put up with the sort of ribbing (or, indeed, oppression) they get in classrooms full of boys/men also learning "men's skills" like plumbing, women plumbers, heating engineers etc have - in my experience - a tendency to be more skilled and reliable than your average male plumber.

A friend phoned me just before the work started to say "You do know X used to be a man don't you." Maybe I'm very unobservant but I hadn't noticed this and my response was rather *shrug whatever*.

The plumber turned up, took far longer than necessary, was far more expensive than estimated, was insulting and demeaning, and completely wrecked my utility room, so much so that it took me years to gather myself together and get the remaining work done on my house.

This ties in with what you say above about the notion of being "innately" female. This theory denies all the evidence about our experiences, whether male, female or other, shaping us through time.

Someone who learns a "male" trade like plumbing as a man does not go through the same alienating experience that a woman would learning plumbing etc amongst a group of typical teenagers or men. They will not be the sort of person who would have given up unless utterly determined to learn that skill. It is very likely that they will be a no better than average plumber as a result. In that sense my friend was right to mention that this

person used to be a man, as my assumption that they were a woman plumber and hence would probably do a better than average job was incorrect.

However maybe, in a few cases, it's worse than that. The plumber was demeaning and insulting in a way which was extremely similar to the worst sort of "Don't you worry you pretty little head about that" that most women will recognise only too well.

Not only had this person remained "a male plumber" despite their sex change, they also had retained the demeaning attitude of some workmen.

And in fact their work was so awful it would be entirely appropriate to describe them as "a cowboy plumber".

Of course, it has to be said, this person, of whatever gender, was an assh*ole of the first order and this incident does not generalise to the vast majority of trans people or anyone else.

I have however, been accused to being a bigoted TERF for even mentioning the possibility that a woman who learned her trade when she was a man is not "a woman plumber" in some senses.

My rather bitter, joking observation at the time was that perhaps there are some men out there who hate women so much that they are prepared to undergo sex changes just to insult women even more and to undermine the notion that women who undertake male trades like plumbing, gas plumbing, cabinet making, building work etc are not generally more skilled and committed than the average man.

That was a joke. Obviously you'd have to be quite bonkers to go through such an ordeal as a sex change unless you really felt it was necessary.

However, reading your article, especially the observations about closing down non-complaint female voices, you would have to say that if these radical trans feminist-deniers did not exist, extreme patriarchal "meninist" men would probably be quite proud of themselves were they, somehow, to invent them.

Frankly, I feel incredibly sorry for all the "ordinary" trans (and intersex and any other generally undecided or non-standard) people that these violently anti-women trans women have taken it upon themselves to represent.



Deborah Peifer

May 17, 2015 at 19:46

What an extraordinary essay—thought-provoking, considerate, well-argued, and, IMHO, fair to all sides. I expect you'll be vilified by the transmaniacs, but I thank you for your thoughtful, reasoned explication of what has become a war on feminism and on

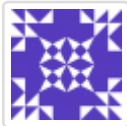
women, waged in the name of gender ideology.



Australopithecene

May 18, 2015 at 01:17

Great essay. This really helps clear the waters muddled by (deliberately) unclear language and vague claims. More plain speech, please!



hora

May 18, 2015 at 03:56

Tigger, I think there is indeed a strain within trans activism (and, more generally, gay male culture as epitomized by drag) that truly does hate women so much that they feel driven to re-make what womanhood IS.

They think that natal women do womanhood poorly, and that they can do it better, and that they have a right to. Not just because they are men, and men always believe that they can do things better than us dumb women, but precisely because their way of "doing womanhood" is NOT feminist, and that is their definition of "better":

*they don the demeaning garb of femininity (heels, makeup, hot pants, fishnets, etc.) *without any hint of contradiction*, because they have not undergone the psychological trauma of being socialized as a girl/woman. The complex feelings natal women have in relation to the femininity they are forced to perform and their bodies, which they are forced to perform it with, are absent. What a relief, our stupid female "hangups" were ruining all the fun of being a "slut" and "loving it".

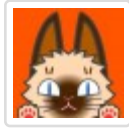
*They get sexual thrills from the idea of being a sex object. Again, our stupid hangups were ruining things like "free love," "totally uninhibited sex," and other sexual extremes to which many men in this culture are driven.

*Our "hangups" also ruined the male fantasy that deep down women are all dying to be sexual objects, we "want it," etc. Feminism was thus ruining the patriarchal delusion that what "free" women look like is "whores" or "sluts."

*Autogynephilic "trans" men (men who have a sexual fetish in which they are obsessed with and turned on by the idea of being "women", i.e. sexually debased / objectified) are a strong force in trans activism. But if feminists go around pointing out that being objectified and sexually debased isn't actually (a) good in any way (b) proper to women, we are ruining the great, guilt-free time they could be having getting off on this sick fantasy.

I'm not saying that all trans people or all trans activists are intentionally trying to put the power to remake womanhood (in a way that reinforced patriarchal values) in the hands of

men. However, the logic is all built-in. If you swallow the gender essentialist nonsense, it all follows from there, and you don't have to be consciously misogynist in order to get truly attached to that logic and to even dedicate your life to defending it. Especially if you are a man.



gender is war

May 18, 2015 at 05:12

I want to reblog this forever.



Fay Roberts

May 18, 2015 at 12:35

I would like to say, explicitly, that I was glad to read something so well-thought-out, articulate, and knowledgeable about the issues explored. It gave me more insight than I had about differing theoretical standpoints, and was very inspirational, from that perspective. Also: pinky score for privilege. Love it. 😊

My worry is that you have presented a standpoint that assumes that most trans* activists oppose feminism, and that this is as fallacious as trans* activists assuming that most feminism is represented by those passionately opposed to trans* ideology.

I am also concerned because, while the article is often kind, compassionate, and objective, it (sometimes very abruptly, to my sensibilities) dips sharply into a defensive, us vs. them tone which makes it harder to read and absorb. For me, personally, I think I would have found it easier to take on board the notions proposed if the earlier tone had stayed throughout.

I think I would like to see something that talks about how trans* activists and feminists have helped and supported each other in the past, and suggestions for how they can do it in future. While it was fascinating to read this perspective, it doesn't help me (a cis-gendered but somewhat genderqueer, "female", late-wave feminist) see how I can move on when the two positions are presented as so entrenched in essential dichotomy.

You asked the question: "Is there a way to move towards a more constructive discussion?" - I would love to know more about how you think that can, in reasonably practical terms, occur.

I have had arguments with anti-feminist trans* folk, and with trans-erasing "feminists" (I put this in quotes as they seemed to have a very narrow view of which human rights should be fought for, and that makes me wary of anyone using what is essentially a human rights activism label), and I would like to find a way forward, rather than endlessly retracing the same ground of Less Privileged Than Thou.

I also want to say, explicitly, that I loved the repeated message of “you’re okay as you are” – it was this that made me want to continue reading. Thanks again for this article.



Kate Smurthwaite

May 19, 2015 at 02:07

I’m a bit puzzled to know why my name appears in this (admittedly very interesting) article. I have never appeared at, organised or spoken at an event at which trans people were excluded. The allegations made about me at the time of the cancellation of my Goldsmiths show were that I had “the wrong” opinion about how best to prevent harm in the sex industry and I was accused (quite unreasonably) of Islamophobia. I did comment on trans issues in an interview I did for Morning Star:

http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/a-b3d7-IWD-Feminist-ideas-are-turned-against-us/#_VVqMZ0Ktz8M which I think makes it pretty clear I support trans rights.



Cassandra

May 19, 2015 at 03:16

This should be required reading for anyone who calls herself a feminist. This is the real thing. This is absolutely brilliant.

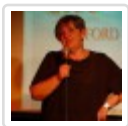


brilliant

May 19, 2015 at 16:34

Thanks for your clarity, compassion, intelligence, and logic. This is the best article I’ve seen on the clash of theory.

I think there is another layer of theory that is a motivator for transactivist ideology, and that is the legal theories trans lobby lawyers must attempt to align with in order to obtain desired legal results. I’m referring to the legal theory that “gender is immutable”, which requires that certain material facts exist, and if they do not exist, and even if they erase long-held feminist theory, they must nevertheless be made to exist as legal fictions.



Debbie Cameron

May 19, 2015 at 17:42

Thanks Kate, we take the point that in your case the controversy was about the sex industry rather than trans, and we’re glad to have the link making clear what your views are. Though the piece does concentrate on conflicts between trans activists and feminists, the reference to you in the introductory section was meant to point to the more general phenomenon of feminists who articulate certain political arguments being accused

of engaging in hate speech.



marymacha

May 28, 2015 at 04:07

Great article! I just wanted to clarify for any who may not know that TERF stands for:

Totally

Excellent

Real

Female



okay

June 13, 2015 at 01:17

Gender *is* invented. I don't even know what transgender is supposed to mean. Whatever hormonally-induced very minor differences there might be between female and male brains, which aren't even consistent-individual women are as different from one another as they are from men-the fact remains that femininity and masculinity, which are actually what gender is, vary widely from culture to culture. Right now in our culture feminine means wearing makeup and high heels, for example, but at other times in our history men were wearing makeup and high heels. In this culture women wear skirts but in some others men wear them. I could go on and on.

The reason I say I don't even know what transgender means is because a strict definition of the term that is actually based in reality would mean that a cross-dresser is a transgender person. I think quite a few cross-dressers would hotly disagree with that notion.

As for the idea of trans being based in "gender dysphoria", whatever that means, first off, "cisgendered" het straight women suffer body dysphoria and they're not trans and secondly, it's not true that all trans suffer GD. Quite some number of them, in fact, do not.

And you can't be born in the wrong body. The DNA for your brain and body are exactly the same, unless you're a genetic chimera, which is atypical in humans and a relatively small portion of the population. I have yet to hear whether anyone's testing trans people for genetic chimerism.

Nor do I ever hear anyone referring to males with androgen insensitivity syndrome (AIS) as being trans, even though they are closer to transsexual than anyone currently active in the community, visible in the media, etc. and in fact were born that way.

We're supposed to accept men in dresses as transwomen now even if there's no evidence

apart from the dress and their say-so. That's going to lead to some dangerous situations. I in fact ran across a news story a couple days ago about a man in a dress infiltrating a women's bathroom and trying to look into an occupied stall. This is just the beginning, and it will get worse, assuming we aren't seeing it happening a lot already and the women are just afraid to speak up because EVERYONE on the left will shout them down.

Except radfems.

The worst part of all this is we are supposed to cater to transwomen but transmen are almost invisible in these debates. Transwomen are supposed to be allowed into women's bathrooms because men might beat them up, but transmen who are a full foot smaller with a much shorter arm reach compared to transwomen are on their own if they're in the men's bathroom and suddenly outed.

Probably has nothing to do with them being genetically female and genetic females being worthless in this culture, right?

I love these trans activists. Radfems trying to "make them disappear." Meanwhile THEY are making WOMEN disappear. How long, I wonder, will it be before there are no more genetic women in pro sports because transwomen are allowed on women's teams and held to be superior athletes? How long before we might as well not bother collecting data on women's health because it's been watered down with transwomen's data? I mean they're women, right? They can't make us *totally* disappear but they can sure push as far as possible in that direction.

I love all their rape and death threats against radfems, too. We do not likewise threaten them. We just don't want them elbowing their way into our spaces, appropriating our language, pretending to be us. I thought coming out as trans was supposed to enable them to accept themselves. Great, so go ahead and do that. Quit trying to be us.

['You are Killing Me': On Hate Speech and Feminist Silencing | Jane Clare Jones](#)
[May 16, 2015 at 20.28](#)

[...] New post which, I'm pleased to say, is available at <http://www.troubleandstrife.org/new-articles/you-are-killing-me/> [...]

['You Are Killing Me': On Hate Speech and Feminist Silencing « Trouble and Strife | Stop Trans Chauvinism](#)
[May 16, 2015 at 22.30](#)

[...] via 'You Are Killing Me': On Hate Speech and Feminist Silencing « Trouble and Strife.
[...]

[Gender is a hierarchical system enforcing women's subservience | Gender Is War](#)
[May 18, 2015 at 05:24](#)

[...] From Trouble and Strife: [...]

[Do Radical Feminists Deny Trans People's Right to Exist? | Gender Is War](#)
[May 18, 2015 at 06:12](#)

[...] From Trouble and Strife: [...]

[Are you transphobic? Am I? | Purely a figment of your imagination](#)
[May 18, 2015 at 16:08](#)

[...] 'You Are Killing Me': On Hate Speech and Feminist Silencing – exploration and defence of gender-critical feminism, and pushback against the “denying trans rights to exist” axiom [...]

[We need to talk](#)
[June 8, 2015 at 03:02](#)

[...] Jane Clare Jones at Trouble and Strife puts it this way: [...]

[Women Censored by Transpolitics: A Masterpost | Dawn of Kali](#)
[June 27, 2015 at 05:40](#)

[...] Clare Jones wrote this outstanding article on the issue of censoring “transphobes” and why this transpolitical campaign has been [...]

['You Are Killing Me': On Hate Speech and Feminist Silencing | Critiquing Transgender Doctrine & Gender Identity Politics](#)
[July 5, 2015 at 21:20](#)

[...] Continue reading... [...]
